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## Sea Turtles, Birds in Guam, Hawaii Among Species Improving Because of Endangered Species Act

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WASHINGTON— A new Center for Biological Diversity analysis of 110 endangered species finds that 90 percent, including many in Hawaii and the Pacific, are on track to meet recovery goals set by federal scientists. The review examined population trends of plants and animals protected by the Endangered Species Act in all 50 states, including Hawaiian ducks, Laysan ducks, Pacific green sea turtles and Guam rails. Again and again, the analysis finds species on a positive trajectory toward recovery — and in some cases, exceeding expectations.

“There are Endangered Species Act success stories in every state in America, and Hawaii’s no exception,” said Kieran Suckling, executive director of the Center. “No other law in the world has done so much to rescue species from the brink of extinction and put them on a path to recovery. Simply put, the Act has been remarkably successful.”

The study analyzed population data for 110 species from the year each was placed on the endangered species list through 2011. Each species’ actual population trend and trajectory was compared to the timeline for recovery set out in government recovery plans. Nearly all the animals and plants are recovering on time to meet federal goals. The study’s findings are similar to a 2006 Center analysis of all federally protected species in the Northeast, which found 93 percent were stabilized or improving since being put on the endangered species list and 82 percent were on pace to meet recovery goals.

“Some of Hawaii’s signature species, from Pacific green sea turtles to Hawaiian geese, are on their way to recovery thanks to the Endangered Species Act,” Suckling said.

Today’s report, which relies on data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and independent scientists, is a

science-based rebuttal to attacks on the Act by critics like Rep. Doc Hastings (R-Wash.), chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources, who claims the Act is “failing badly” because only 1 percent of species have been recovered. In fact, the report finds that 80 percent of species haven’t been listed for long enough to reach their projected delisting date. On average, species have been protected for 32 years and have a typical expected recovery period of 46 years.

“Saving species from the brink of extinction — and bringing them back to a point where they’re going to survive into the future — can’t happen overnight,” Suckling said. “Calling the Act at failure at this point is like throwing away a 10-day prescription of antibiotics on the third day and saying they don’t work. It just makes no sense.”

For full recovery profiles of the 110 species — and an interactive regional map — go to [www.ESAsuccess.org](http://www.ESAsuccess.org).

## **Hawaii and Pacific Highlights**

**Hawaiian coot.** By 1939, populations of these 15-inch-long birds whose floating nests once dotted ponds and marshes across most of Hawaii's main islands had dropped low enough to warrant a permanent hunting ban. By the late 1960s, fewer than 1,000 birds were thought to remain, and in 1967 they were listed as endangered. With protection the population grew to about 2,100 birds in 2005, with nests on all the main Hawaiian Islands except Kaho'olawe. Studies show that the coot and other Hawaiian waterbirds have benefitted from protection of wetland habitats under the Endangered Species Act, particularly on Oahu and Kauai.

**Hawaiian duck.** By 1949, these small, highly secretive, mottled-brown relatives of the more common mallard were extirpated from Maui and Molokai, rarely seen on Hawaii, and reduced to just 530 birds on Kauai and Oahu. In the early 1960s they occurred only on Kauai, where their population declined significantly between 1956 and 1982 due largely to intense development pressures on streams where they bred and wetlands where they fed. During the same period, ducks from captive-breeding programs were reintroduced on Hawaii, Maui and Oahu. In 1967, they were listed as endangered. Overall, estimates between the 1960s and 2000 suggested stable populations, though those numbers were hard to verify because of inbreeding with mallard ducks. The most recent estimate is of 2,200 birds on Kauai and Hawaii, along with an unknown number of pure Hawaiian ducks among the 350 birds on Oahu and Maui. The 2011 federal recovery plan concludes the population is increasing.

**Hawaiian goose.** Once numbering more than 20,000 and found on most of the larger Hawaiian Islands, populations of the goose that would become the state bird were gradually depleted by farming, overhunting and introduction of the mongoose. By 1918, only about 30 of the gray, brown and white-feathered birds — known for breeding and nesting on the slopes of volcanoes — remained. The species was listed as endangered in 1967. Captive-breeding programs in the mid-20th century released more than 2,300 of the geese, and today they are found in the wild on the islands of Hawaii, Maui and Kauai. By 2006, the population was estimated at more than 1,700.

**Laysan duck.** The brown ducks, known for their unique feeding habit of lowering their open bills to the ground and sprinting through clouds of swarming brine flies, were once found throughout the Hawaiian Islands. By the late 19th century their populations had been reduced to two islands, Lisianski and Laysan, where overhunting and introduction of mice and rabbits that denuded the islands of vegetation helped drive the ducks' population down to just seven adults on Laysan Island by 1911. Once the rabbits fully denuded Laysan Island and starved to death, the ducks' numbers slowly increased to about 500 birds by 1957. Ten years later they were listed as endangered. In 2004, 20 ducks were translocated to Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. The combined populations from the two islands peaked near 900 in 2010 and the International Union for Conservation of Nature was considering downlisting the duck from "critically endangered" to "vulnerable" before the 2011 tsunami washed over both islands. Still, it is believed the Laysan population may have reached a sustainable carrying capacity of about 500 birds.

**Pacific green sea turtle.** The primary U.S. population of these magnificent turtles occurs in Hawaii, where more than 90 percent of nesting occurs at French Frigate Shoals. Due to cessation of hunting and protection of habitat, nesting females increased from 75 in 1973 to 470 in 2003. From 2002 to 2006, the population averaged 400 turtles, and a five-year review in 2007 found the population trend to be increasing. Other U.S.-associated Pacific Islands that support green sea turtle populations include: American Samoa, with 25 to 35 nesting females; the Federated States of Micronesia, with more than 100 nesting females; and Guam, with two nesting females.